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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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A lasting and genuine ceasefire for the Republic of Yemen is urgent

On 9 August 2018, a Saudi-led coalition airstrike hit a school bus in the northern province of Saada in the Republic of Yemen. 51 people died during the attack. 40 of them were children between the age of 6 to 11. All in all, 59 of the 79 wounded were children.1 The bomb that hit the school bus had been bought by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as part of a U.S. –Saudi arms deal, according to CNN. This incident is the the most recent catastrophy in a proxy war which has been raging for more than four years in the Republic of Yemen. The main victim of the conflict is the civilian population of the Republic of Yemen. Henrietta Fore, head of the UN children's aid organization Unicef, has stated that at least 2,200 children have already been killed in the conflict. In an interview with a German newspaper, Germany's Development Aid Minister Gerd Müller also talked about the fact that more than ten million war refugees are fighting for their very survival in the Republic of Yemen.2 The situation of the people in the Republic of Yemen constitutes the world's biggest humanitarian catastrophe.

Attacks on Hudaida and the results of the blockade

The situation of the civilian population, especially in northern Yemen, has become even more dramatic since the "Arab coalition", led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), began to attack the port city of Hudaida 230 kilometers southwest of the capital Sanaa. 80 percent of the relief supplies reach the civil war country via Hudaida. It is also a key point for most commercial goods. The attacks on the port city of Hudaida by the Saudi-led coalition were justified with the claim that the Shiite Huthi rebels are supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran via this harbor. The Huthis from North Yemen took over the port city in 2013, invaded the capital a year later and expelled President Abed Rabbo Mansur Hadi and his government from office. Since 2015, the "Arab Coalition" military operation has been fighting against the rebels and for the reinstatement of the old government. The war in the Republic of Yemen is also an expression of the great conflict between the Shiite and Sunni powers in the region.

The UNHCR is currently talking about two million people who are internally displaced persons. However, more than 22 million people, about three-quarters of the overall population of the country, are depending on support. This applies to all basic needs - from nutrition and accommodation to medical care and education. The severe damage of the water and sewage system increases the risk of a cholera epidemic. At least 2,200 children have already died in the conflict3. In addition, Yemen has been hosting around 280,000 refugees from the Horn of Africa - mainly from Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia. The UNHCR with its staff of 200 people working in Yemen is taking care almost exclusively of the refugees. Due to a lack of money, UNHCR cannot adequately support the population. As early as March 2017, our human rights organization has made serious accusations against the governments in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The war in the Republic of Yemen leads to serious human rights violations and war crimes. Since March 2015, at least 12,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands are injured. More than 2,000 schools have been destroyed or severely damaged. With 22 million of the 26 million Yemenis, almost 85 percent of the population depends on humanitarian aid. About 7.6 million, including three million children and women, suffer from malnutrition. 173,000 people have already left the Republic of Yemen.

In June 2018, Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) appealed to the UN Security Council to condemn the attack on the port city of Hudeida as a crime against humanity and to demand an immediate suspension of the fighting. The UN Security Council should have fulfilled its responsibility to protect the civilian population and should have stopped the attacks on Hodeida. Now an even greater humanitarian catastrophe is threatening the Republic of Yemen. In addition, the current escalation of the war in the Republic of Yemen is endangering the 600,000 inhabitants of Hudeida. All statements by the attacking military that they wanted to avoid ground fighting were and are not realistic. The disastrous effects of the escalation of violence can already be seen today, when relief organizations and humanitarian workers of the United Nations had to flee the city.

Strengthen peaceful mediation efforts

It is irresponsible that the UN's peace efforts, after weeks of negotiations about a withdrawal of the Huthi rebels from Hudeida, have now been undermined. The coalition of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,

1 https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/13/middleeast/yemen-children-school-bus-strike-intl/index.html

2 https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article178774808/Migration-Entwicklungsminister-Gerd-Mueller-warnt-Europa-vor-neuen-Krisen.html

3 https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/peace-only-way-forward

armed and militarily supported by the United States, is playing with the lives of millions of people and ignoring the principle of responsibility to protect, to which the international community of states committed itself at the Millennium Summit in 2005. We repeatedly called on the international organizations to work for an actual end of the blockade of the Republic of Yemen by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The end of the blockade and the attacks on Hodeida is necessary to prevent a disaster. Our human rights organization is in constant contact with individuals in the Republic of Yemen. They told us that the short-term easing of the blockade of Hodeida has done very little to the civilian population, especially in northern Yemen. The people in the Republic of Yemen are urgently asking to lift finally the inhuman blockade indefinitely.

The coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has only eased the blockade of Yemen for 30 days. This loosening up hardly helped because the airports, seaports and border crossings were closed repeatedly. This made food and fuel even scarcer and more expensive. An ongoing blockade would therefore constitute the use of hunger as a weapon of war and a crime against humanity.

Prevent a major humanitarian disaster and help all civilians effectively

According to the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM), only 1.69 million tons of fuel were imported into the country via the ports of Hodeida and Ras Isa on the Red Sea in 2017. This is only one third of the quantity required. Added to this are the continuing "bureaucratic" practices of the Saudis and the Huthi rebels supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran, which literally prevent the rapid import of essential goods. The consequences are extreme food shortages, price increases and the situation is particularly bad for the minority group Al-Akhdam, which even before the war has always been excluded from society. They have been discriminated against for centuries because of their darker skin color and often suffer under slavery like conditions, although slavery officially was abolished in the Republic of Yemen in the 1960s. The Al-Akhdam live predominantly in urban slums of the contested Yemeni cities such as Taizz or in the capital Sanaa, which have been repeatedly attacked by the Saudi air force. As a result of the war, the Al-Akhdam have fallen into an unimaginable misery, and are almost completely ignored in the distribution of the few relief supplies that reach Yemen. With 500,000 to three million members, this ethnic group represents two to ten percent of the 26 million inhabitants of the country.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to demand that:

- The international community of states should work with all warring parties and their protective powers to ensure that aid organizations have free access to the population in need.
- The civil war in the Republic of Yemen has expanded into a proxy war between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, there should be an international initiative by the international community, the United Nations or the European Union to open talks with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States of America and the Russian Federation to end the war.
- To Influence the government in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to comply with international agreements. All warring parties must observe the law of war martial law and the agreed cease-fire periods.
- International relief organizations that can operate in Yemen must urgently try to ensure that minorities such as the Al-Akhdam also receive humanitarian aid.